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ABSTRACT

This working paper examines the theories of Fred Fiedler concerning the effectiveness of different leadership styles in different situations. Discussed first are the distinctions that Fiedler makes between what he terms relationship-motivated leaders and task-motivated leaders. The next section comprises an explanation of Fiedler's view of situation control as a function of three separate factors: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. Formulas are provided for comparing situational control and for relating leadership style to situational control. To facilitate the use of these formulas, the special challenges presented by high-, medium-, and low-control situations are discussed along with the special cases in which an individual assumes the role of a new leader and in which a job moves from one type of control situation to another. Steps for making a job fit a leader are outlined. Appended to the paper are scales for leader-member relations, task structure, position power, and situational control. (MN)

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LEADERSHIP MATCH

THE THEORIES OF FRED FIEDLER

Colin M. Turner
1979

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Leadership Match - the Theories of Fred Fiedler

Fiedler is concerned to relate style of leadership to the situation in which leaders operate, and to relate particular styles to particular situations in terms of their effectiveness. He therefore attempts to do three things:

1. Measure leadership style
2. Measure leadership situation
3. Relate the two in terms of effectiveness.

Leadership Style

Fiedler uses a short questionnaire which respondents fill in on behalf of a fellow worker with whom she/he could work least well (not necessarily the one least liked). The results of the questionnaire give the L.P C scale (Least Preferred Co-worker) and from this is derived two categories of respondents. Those who score highly are described as relationship-motivated and those whose scores are low are described as task-motivated. There is a group which scores in the middle which is neither specifically task or relationship motivated, and individuals in this group have to make their own decisions as to which description fits them best.

Relationship motivated Leaders (R+)

Get their major satisfaction from good personal relationships with others.
Depend for self-esteem on how others regard them and relate to them.
Need good relations to feel at ease.
Are sensitive to what others are feeling.
Do not get upset when things are complicated.
Enjoy ambiguity and value opportunities for creative thinking.
Encourage others to participate and offer different ideas.
Are non-punitive but worry about the welfare of others and the group.
May pay less attention to the task if the group or individuals need a lot of support and help.

Task motivated Leaders (T+)

Are strongly motivated to complete successfully any task they take on.
Work through clear, standardised work procedures.
Have a no-nonsense attitude about getting down to work.
Prefers having respect than affection from others.
Are considerate to others provided everything is under control.

NB. T+ leaders can be as well-liked as R+ leaders. They do not necessarily have poor relations with their group, but it is not the quality of those relations which most motivates them.

Leadership Situation - Situation Control

The most important variable in the leadership situation is the degree to which it provides leaders with control and influence, i.e., the extent to which the leader can determine what is going to be done, and how his group will respond to his demands, and what the outcome of the activities will be. Fiedler called this Situation Control. He measured the degree of situation control in any particular job through three separate factors.

1. Leader-member relations
2. Task Structure
3. Position Power.

By measuring the level of situation control in all these three factors and totalling them together Fiedler obtained a reading for overall situation control.
We will examine each of these factors in a little more detail.

Leader-Member Relations

This is the most important of the three factors. It measure the loyalty, dependability and support you as leader get from those with whom you work. If they are behind you, in trying to get the job done, then your control of the situation is likely to be quite high. As is obvious from the questions on the rating scale, Leader-member relations are concerned not only with the support given by the group to the leader, but also the support given between members of the group. The degree of friction between members, the relative cohesiveness of the group, is an important determinant of the degree of control the leader has.

A score of 30 or above indicates good leader-member relations, a score of under 20 indicates poor relations.

Task Structure

The second most important factor is task structure. This is concerned with the degree to which the task is spelled out clearly, the goals are known, the procedures for getting the job done are clearly laid down, and measures for assessing successful completion are available.

As without adequate training and experience, a leaders control over task structure will always be low, however clear the structure is, Fiedler adds a corrective score based on the amount of relevant training and experience. This is not used if the task structure score is below 6. A score of 14 or above is considered to indicate high task structure, and a score of 6 or below a low task structure.

Position Power

The third and least important factor is the degree of power the leader has over his work force. Among important considerations for assessing power are: the availability of rewards and sanctions: the willingness of the work force to comply with orders: the support given to the leader by his boss.

There is a particular difficulty in using this rating scale. People in positions of authority, such as Principals or Headteachers almost invariably under-estimate the power of their own position, and over-estimate the power of others. A score of 7 or over indicates high position power, and a score of 3 or under indicates low position power.

Computing Situational Control

If ratings are made on all the three scales that have been described, and if the corrective adjustment is used where it is necessary for experience and training, we can add the scores together to reach a total score for situational control in any particular job. Scores over 51 indicate high control, scores of 31-50 moderate control, and scores 10-30 low control. It is clear that the sub-score with the greatest influence is that for leader-member relations. This accords with common sense. If a leader has a cohesive group which trusts and supports him and each other, then the leader has considerable control even if Task Structure and/or Position Power are not very high. On the other hand even if the leader is in a position where Task Structure is high and he has considerable position power, he will not have much control over the situation if his group don't trust him, won't support him in crunch circumstances, and are niggling with each other all the time.

Relating Leadership Style to Situational Control

So far we have obtained two measure:

1) Leadership Style in terms of R+ or T+
2) Situational Control in terms of High, Moderate or Low.

If we relate these two together we obtain six possible cells.

Situational Control

LEADERSHIP STYLE	High	Medium	Low
R+			
T+			

What concerned Fiedler was what was the most efficient style of leadership for the various types of situational control. He argued as follows:

1. High Control Situations

In these situations, conditions are predictable. The task is highly structured so everyone knows what to do and how to do it. The leader has the power to back up his authority with appropriate rewards and punishments, and he has the support of the group members. He can therefore feel reasonably certain and secure that a) his directions will be followed and b) his decisions will have the intended outcomes.

This situation secures good performance from a T+ leader but a poorer one from an R+ leader. The R+ leader is likely to become bored and are no longer challenged. They may become prickly with their staff or withdrawn. On the other hand the T+ leader will be relaxed because the task is going well and therefore develop good relations with subordinates. There is time for the pleasantries.

2. Moderate Control Situations

These situations present mixed problems. Leaders may be supported by the group but have an ambiguous or unstructured task and little formal authority. Or the task might be structured, and the leader have considerable power, but be unsupported by the group. The leader has therefore to enjoy situations of some ambiguity where he may not have much formal power but must spend time being diplomatic and supportive to the group in order to get their co-operation.

This situation secures good performance from R+ leaders and poorer ones from the T+ leader. The R+ leader enjoys the challenge of dealing with uncertain group relations in situations of some task ambiguity. They ease tension, reduce conflict and handle creative decision making groups very well. The T+ leader, however, experiences considerable anxiety in this situation. He cannot easily handle group conflict and does not easily identify with the feelings of the group. He is unhappy with the uncertainties of task structure and performance, and is constantly trying to impose an order where none is possible.

3. Low Control Situations

There are challenging and stressful situations. The task is unclear, there are no definite procedures or methods, the group members do not appear to like or support the leader, and do not work well together among themselves, and the leader has little formal power to get things done.

This situation secures good performance from T+ leaders but poor ones from R+ leaders. R+ leaders become obsessed with the problems of obtaining group support and developing trust relationships, at the expense of the task. If they fail to reduce anxieties or stresses they may respond by withdrawal from the situation. On the other hand the T+ leader enjoys facing up to a challenging task whereby drive and hard work they can get tasks done. They can exert tight control and discipline over the group which earns them respect if not affection for reaching the goal of task completion in difficult circumstances.

N.B. It is very important to note that because a person is R+ it does not mean he is necessarily good at dealing with people: only that his major concern is with people. He might in fact be very unskilful. Similarly a T+ leader might not be good at task achievement, but at least that is his major concern.

So if Fiedler is correct, leadership style and situational control is matched with efficiency in the following way.

	High	Moderate	Low
T+	More efficient	Less efficient	More efficient
R+	Less efficient	More efficient	Less efficient

Two Special Cases

1. The New Leader. When someone takes over a leadership job then however high the situational control has been, it is automatically reduced to moderate, in the eyes of the new leader. This is because he has to get to know the group and they have to learn to trust him, he has to find out what power he has and how it can be used, and he has to learn about the rules procedures, systems and other aspects of task structure. This means that for the first few months, a situation of high control becomes temporarily one of moderate control. It follows that at first the R+ leader would show up much better than a T+ leader. However, as the leader gets accepted by the group, exerts his available power and gets familiar with the system, so the situation reverts to one of high control. Now the T+ leader begins to show up better and the R+ leader begins to show signs of discontent. It follows that in situations of high control a) the T+ leader must begiven time to show his ability b) the R+ leader must be given fairly frequent moves, because it is the new situation he responds to, not the inherent nature of the job.

2. Jobs which move from one Situation to Another. If in a low structured job a T+ leader of ability works hard and successfully to knock the team into shape and to get better systems organised, he will quite probably move the situation from one of low to one of moderate control. In those circumstances he is likely to be increasingly unhappy and ineffective. It follows that T+ leaders used for such rescue work should be moved to a new low control situation after they have achieved some success. Problems may arise over redefining jobs which change the nature of situational control for the leader. Thought should be given to the consequences of such job reorganisation which takes into account Fiedler's theory.

Making the Job Fit the Leader

Very often the leader is not able to move from his job, and if he feels that there is not a match between his style and situation then it is necessary to explore ways of modifying the job. Lack of match frequently comes out in feelings of boredom, stress, anxiety, over-work, withdrawal, anger etc. The R+ leader in a high control situation needs to look

for challenging and difficult problems with uncertain outcomes. There are always some in the most routine organisation, and there are plenty in schools and colleges. A Head of Department might, for example, delegate much of his structured work, even if it is the most prestigious part of his job, to deal with the awkward, unhappy or inefficient members of staff, or groups which are not working together as well as they should. Or he might take on the curriculum development of experimental courses. A T+ leader might concentrate on those parts of the organisation which require improvement in structuring, for example the development of information systems or job specifications, and re-define someone else's job to encompass the problematic, ambiguous, and joint creative decision making tasks. Although many jobs are relatively unchangeable almost all are capable of some modification or change of emphasis. It is Fiedler's argument that if we know what is most suitable for us we are in a much better position to arrange our job so that style matches situation.

Further Reading

F. Fiedler. A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness
McGraw Hill 1967.

F. Fiedler et al. Improving Leadership Effectiveness:
The Leader Match Concept.
Wiley 1977.

LEADER-MEMBER RELATIONS SCALE

Circle the number which best represents your response to each item.

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. The people I supervise have trouble getting along with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My subordinates are reliable and trustworthy.	5	4	3	2	1
3. There seems to be a friendly atmosphere among the people I supervise.	5	4	3	2	1
4. My subordinates always cooperate with me in getting the job done.	5	4	3	2	1
5. There is friction between my subordinates and myself.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My subordinates give me a good deal of help and support in getting the job done.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The people I supervise work well together in getting the job done.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I have good relations with the people I supervise.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score ☐

TASK STRUCTURE RATING SCALE – PART I

Circle the number in the appropriate column.	Usually True	Sometimes True	Seldom True
Is the Goal Clearly Stated or Known?			
1. Is there a blueprint, picture, model or detailed description available of the finished product or service?	2	1	0
2. Is there a person available to advise and give a description of the finished product or service, or how the job should be done?	2	1	0
Is There Only One Way to Accomplish the Task?			
3. Is there a step-by-step procedure, or a standard operating procedure which indicates in detail the process which is to be followed?	2	1	0
4. Is there a specific way to subdivide the task into separate parts or steps?	2	1	0
5. Are there some ways which are clearly recognized as better than others for performing this task?	2	1	0
Is There Only One Correct Answer or Solution?			
6. Is it obvious when the task is finished and the correct solution has been found?	2	1	0
7. Is there a book, manual, or job description which indicates the best solution or the best outcome for the task?	2	1	0
Is It Easy to Check Whether the Job Was Done Right?			
8. Is there a generally agreed understanding about the standards the particular product or service has to meet to be considered acceptable?	2	1	0
9. Is the evaluation of this task generally made on some quantitative basis?	2	1	0
10. Can the leader and the group find out how well the task has been accomplished in enough time to improve future performance?	2	1	0

SUBTOTAL ☐

TASK STRUCTURE RATING SCALE — PART 2

Training and Experience Adjustment

NOTE: Do not adjust jobs with task structure scores of 6 or below.

(a) Compared to others in this or similar positions, how much *training* has the leader had?

3	2	1	0
No training at all	Very little training	A moderate amount of training	A great deal of training

(b) Compared to others in this or similar positions, how much *experience* has the leader had?

6	4	2	0
No experience at all	Very little experience	A moderate amount of experience	A great deal of experience

Add lines (a) and (b) of the training and experience adjustment, then *subtract* this from the subtotal given in Part 1.

Subtotal from Part 1. ☐

Subtract training and experience adjustment − ☐

Total Task Structure Score ☐

POSITION POWER RATING SCALE

Circle the number which best represents your answer.

1. Can the leader directly or by recommendation administer rewards and punishments to his subordinates?

2	1	0
Can act directly or can recommend with high effectiveness	Can recommend but with mixed results	No

2. Can the leader directly or by recommendation affect the promotion, demotion, hiring or firing of his subordinates?

2	1	0
Can act directly or can recommend with high effectiveness	Can recommend but with mixed results	No

3. Does the leader have the knowledge necessary to assign tasks to subordinates and instruct them in task completion?

2	1	0
Yes	Sometimes or in some aspects	No

4. Is it the leader's job to evaluate the performance of his subordinates?

2	1	0
Yes	Sometimes or in some aspects	No

5. Has the leader been given some official title of authority by the organization (e.g., foreman, department head, platoon leader)?

2	0
Yes	No

Total ☐

SITUATIONAL CONTROL SCALE

Enter the total scores for the Leader-Member Relations dimension, the Task Structure scale, and the Position Power scale in the spaces below. Add the three scores together and compare your total with the ranges given in the table below to determine your overall situational control.

1. *Leader-Member Relations Total* ☐

2. *Task Structure Total* ☐

3. *Position Power Total* ☐

Grand Total ☐

Total Score	**51 - 70**	**31 - 50**	**10 - 30**
Amount of Situational Control	**High Control**	**Moderate Control**	**Low Control**